

ARAB AMERICAN HERITAGE MONTH

History

The initiative for an official national designation of Arab American Heritage Month was launched in 2017 by the nonprofit media and education organization [Arab American Foundation](#) and its sister organization Arab America. In 2019, U.S. Rep. Debbie Dingell (D-Michigan.) and Rep. Rashida Tlaib (D-Michigan), [introduced a resolution](#) to Congress to proclaim April as National Arab American Heritage Month. The bill remains pending. National Arab American Heritage Month was recognized in April 2021 by President Joe Biden, with the U.S. Department of State, some members of Congress and 37 governors issuing proclamations supporting the month, according to Arab America.

[Arab American Heritage Month Origins](#)

Who are Arab Americans?

Arab Americans come from the 22 Arabic-speaking countries across the Middle East & North America (MENA), who's primary language is Arabic. Every Arab country is also a member of the Arab League, an intergovernmental alliance created to unify the Arab nationals politically and represent the interests of the Arab people. Arabs are people with a particular shared history, base language, and culture. According to the World Bank, the Arab world a total of population of 465 million as of 2022.



Algeria	Jordan	Oman	Syria
Bahrain	Kuwait	Palestine	Tunisia
Comoros	Lebanon	Qatar	United Arab Emirates
Djibouti	Libya	Saudi Arabia	Yemen
Egypt	Mauritania	Somalia	
Iraq	Morocco	Sudan	

Arab is not the same as Middle Eastern

In addition, the Census Bureau's classification for the MENA population is geographically based and includes Arabic-speaking groups, such as Egyptian and Jordanian, and non-Arabic speaking groups, such as Iranian and Israeli. The Middle East includes non-Arabic nations such as Iran, Israel, and Turkey. Similarly, not all Arabic nations are located in the Middle East – including Egypt, Algeria, and Morocco. It also includes ethnic and transnational groups from the region, such as Assyrian and Kurdish.

ARAB AMERICAN HERITAGE MONTH

US Census

Obtaining national data on Arab Americans remains difficult and challenging due to the U.S. Census categorizing Arabs and other Middle Easterners as “white.” Arab American advocacy groups have long argued that the form’s categories do not reflect the actual experiences of the vast majority of Arab Americans, who are not treated as white in their everyday lives. In 2018, however, the Census Bureau announced that it would not include a Middle East/North American (MENA) category. Instead, the next survey will ask participants who check “white” or “black” to write in their “origins” for the first time. Lebanese and Egyptian are among the suggestions under white.

What is this person's race?

Mark one or more boxes **AND** print origins.

White – Print, for example, German, Irish, English, Italian, Lebanese, Egyptian, etc. ↴

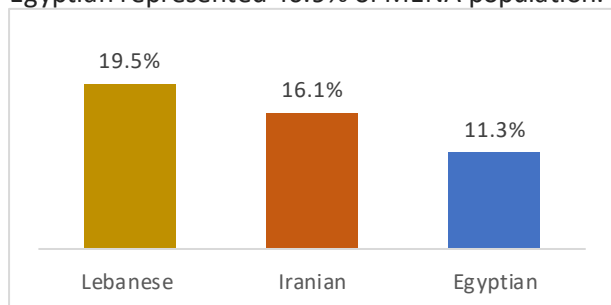
Black or African Am. – Print, for example, African American, Jamaican, Haitian, Nigerian, Ethiopian, Somali, etc. ↴

American Indian or Alaska Native – Print name of enrolled or principal tribe(s), for example, Navajo Nation, Blackfeet Tribe, Mayan, Aztec, Native Village of Barrow Inupiat Traditional Government, Nome Eskimo Community, etc. ↴

Arab Americans in the United States

Population

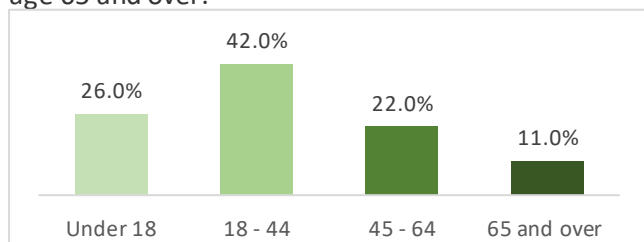
In 2020, over 3.5 million people identified as Middle Eastern/North African. Together Lebanese, Iranian and Egyptian represented 46.9% of MENA population.



The number of Arab Americans nearly quadrupled since 1980 and is among the fastest growing Arab diaspora populations in the world. The number of Arab Americans grew by nearly 30% between 2010 and 2022.

Age

About 26% of the total MENA population was under age 18; 42% ages 18 to 44; 22% ages 45 to 64; and 11% age 65 and over.



Language

A 2016 study by the Pew Research Center found that Arabic is the **fastest growing language** in the U.S. The number of people who speak Arabic at home increased by 29 percent between 2010 and 2014.

Religion

Arab Americans are religiously diverse, much like the Arab world. Although the earliest immigrants were mostly Christian with smaller numbers of Muslims, today the Arab American community is comprised of Christian, Muslims, Druze, Jews, Mandaen and other faiths, along with secular identities.

Education

Arab Americans are among the most educated demographic. More than 40 percent have a four-year degree, and 17 percent have a postgraduate degree, according to arabamericanstories.org.

Immigration

Political instability and war have led to a significant rise in Arab immigration. Since the U.S. invasion of Iraq, the number of Arab American refugees has skyrocketed, with nearly 70,000 moving to the U.S. in 2017, compared with just 26,000 in 2003. President Donald Trump’s Muslim travel ban and immigration policies, however, decreased the number of refugees able to find asylum in the U.S. in recent years.

ARAB AMERICAN HERITAGE MONTH

Health Disparities

Arab Americans are a historically understudied minority group in U.S. and their health needs have been poorly documented. Because Arab Americans are considered White with the US Census Bureau, national health statistics remain elusive and challenging to acquire.

DIABETES

- 4.8 to 23% prevalence
- High prevalence of diabetes and higher odds of diabetes
- Vitamin D insufficiency and hypovitaminosis D were common

ASTHMA

9.4% prevalence lower than Whites and Blacks (14.4%)

INFECTIOUS DISEASE

- Hep C is triple the national average amongst Arab Americans in Southeast Michigan
- Knowledge and care for STDs and HIV were low

FEMALE GENITAL MUTILATION

- Common practice in 30 countries in African, Middle East and Asia
- Practice in the US is low, but those immigrating from other countries is high

CANCER

- Cancer rates among Arab Americans are unknown
- Arab American women tend to be diagnosed with breast cancer at a later stage, yet had higher survival rates

CARDIOVASCULAR DISEASE

- Lack of reliable national data
 - Self-reported hypertension among Arab Americans (13.4%) to be lower than Whites (24.5%)
- Hypercholesterolemia ranged from 24.6% to 44.8%, which is lower than national average of 50.4%

MENTAL HEALTH

- Overall prevalence of depression and other mental health outcomes unknown
- Higher incidence of psychological distress following September 11

ALCOHOL USE

Arab Americans had lower prevalence of alcohol consumption

VACCINATIONS

Arab Americans had lower estimated rates of vaccinations

PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

- Arabs with lower American acculturation have less physical activity, while those to be more acculturated engaged in more physical activities
- Barriers to physical activity include lack of knowledge of gym machines, lack of money for gym membership, and mixed cultural messaging on body image



UCSF RESOURCES

[Muslim Student Association UCSF](#)

[Muslim Community at UCSF](#)

REFERENCES

[Arab America](#)

[Arab America Foundation](#)

[Arab American Institute – Demographics](#)

[Census Bureau – Middle Eastern 2020](#)

[Insight into Diversity](#)

[The Conversation](#)

[The Health of Arab Americans](#)

[White House Proclamation](#)

[World Population Review – Arab Countries](#)

Data provided by [The Health of Arab Americans Lit Review](#)



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